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# THE YOUNG TURKISH FARCE

## IN THREE ACTS

*By Khalil A. Totah, A.M.*

### ACT I—REVOLUTION

SCENE 1—*Army.*

SCENE 2—*Parliament.*

### ACT II—BLUNDER

SCENE 1—*Turkification.*

SCENE 2—*Administration.*

### ACT III—PERDITION

SCENE 1—*The Great War.*

SCENE 2—*The Unseen.*

### ACT I—REVOLUTION

A paper constitution, French clothes and German guns, to the young Turks, appeared to possess a wand with which to transform Turkey from a nauseating cesspool of all that was rotten into a fresh spring bubbling over with constitutional life. By the mere recital of the formula "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" Enver Pasha's troupe managed to get an applause which, however, did not last long. Even the wretched population of Turkey itself was fooled with the rest of the world; but it did not take very long before all eyes were open. The whole thing was a farce and the following scenes will prove it *to be such*.

#### *Scene 1—The Army*

The young Turks staked their salvation on the Army, especially since their present ally, Austria, gobbled up Bosnia and Herzegovina. They aimed at saving the country territorially. As long as they were in possession of territory it seemed to make but little difference to them in what condition it was. The traditions of the Empire were military and they had to be preserved by the new

régime at any cost. With fear from without and military instincts for a stimulant, the so-called modernization of the army began.

The most radical innovation was the conscription of non-Moslems. The underlying principle which aimed at unifying and Ottomanizing the conglomerate population was sublime but its application by the Young Turks was ridiculous. A little bit of history mixed with a grain of common sense could have shown the new party its error. It does not require very keen powers of observation to note that the make-up of the Near East is eminently religious. Its temperament, traditions, and whole atmosphere are permeated with religion. The Turkish soldier flung himself fearlessly at his foes in order to defend his Faith. While serving in the Turkish Army the writer marked the significant use of the word "martyr." Officers and men in speaking of a comrade killed in battle used the word "martyred" instead of "killed." To die in the ranks, with them, was martyrdom. The young Turks exploded this orthodox theory by admitting infidels into the army and thus upset the philosophy of Mohammedan warfare. "Ottomanism" was substituted for religion as a bond, and as an incentive to action, but it stirred neither Jew nor gentile because it stood for nothing tangible. Only a religious wave could lift Turkey in a body and dash it forcibly against a common enemy. As it is the Mohammedan world has lost confidence in the Young Turks which is so clearly proven by the failure of the recent proclamation for a holy war. This new national ideal of "Ottomanism" failed hopelessly to inspire Moslems, Christian and Jew to fight for it, first because it was too novel, abstract and unreal for the half-baked Near East and secondly because of the unfairness of the Young Turks themselves in subordinating the interest of every one else to their own. Their failure in this matter of religion can not be over-emphasized; for the line of demarkation in Turkey is first religious, then racial. As Frederic Bliss aptly points out, the word "religion" is synonymous with "composition," "make up" and "identity." In asking

what kind of a machine an aeroplane is the vernacular Arabic says "What is its religion?" A street fight takes place in Jerusalem. "What is the trouble?" you ask and for an answer you will get "A Moslem is beating a Jew" or "a follower of the Greek Church is fighting with a Catholic" thus using one's religious denomination to identify him.

As it is today military service is the most unpopular institution in Turkey. It is relentlessly compulsory on males between twenty and forty. The German may deem it a privilege to serve in the army and fight for the Fatherland, but the Young Turks, even with their German military training could not persuade the people of Turkey to think likewise. Conditions in both Empires are not alike and by introducing the German system with all its severity, the Young Turkish Party was putting "new wine in old bottles." Military service is a cursed obligation in Turkey and all those that can possibly escape it do so. It is abject slavery for a score of years which is divided into three terms.

1. Nizami, military service proper, 3 years.
2. Ihtiat, reserve Class A, 6 years.
3. Redif, reserve Class B, 11 years.

The author paid \$280 plus three months service to secure exemption from the first term. On the completion of the three months he was listed a reserve which meant that every time he was called upon for the next seventeen years, he was either to bear arms or pay another installment of nearly \$160. Money may be refused and service demanded if the need for men were pressing. Many men have paid the fee three times over and are today fighting in this war.

But why is service in the Turkish Army any worse than it is in any other, the reader might ask. Why are not the people of Turkey willing to fight for their country?

1. First of all they do not feel that they are fighting for their own country. They are forced to fight and thus perpetuate a heavy foreign yoke which they detest.

2. If the Turkish soldier happens to be a Moslem he might get up some enthusiasm to fight for his Faith. This, however, he knows he is not doing at present when on one side of him is a cursed Jew and on the other a Christian dog. A non-Moslem has nothing whatsoever for which to fight. Indeed "he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter." Troops are always sent to serve away from home. They are also mixed up so one race always neutralizes another and no racial mutiny is feared. The soldiers fight because they have to. They dislike and even hate the government. The writer frequently heard Moslem soldiers and non-commissioned officers curse Turkey, the Army and Enver Pasha to boot.

3. Only a Turk has any chance for promotion. Even non-Turkish *Moslems* complain against partiality. This leaves a pretty slim margin for Christians and Jews to be anything but "hewers of wood and drawers of water" in the camp of the Young Turks.

4. The pay of a private is nominally 83 cents a month. Even this large pay is not certain and regular; for in the regiment of the writer were men who served eighteen months in the Balkan War and all they received for salary was a promissory note. For cigarette money, the soldiers had either to importune their already impoverished folks or rob the public. They did both. When the author served his three months after having paid \$280 he had to furnish his uniform, hand it over to the government at the end, leave his school and drill three months for nothing. Moreover, he was permitted to board himself as he could not stand barrack-life which is intolerable by civilized standards. Men sleep in a thin blanket on the floor with nothing but a knapsack for a pillow and an overcoat for bed clothes. They are herded in foul, filthy rooms where the air is vile and no chance for ventilation since the windows are closed by cheap burlap sacks to take the place of window panes. The rooms are dark and crowded with not more than a foot of space between one soldier and another. Every time the writer left the barracks he had

to examine himself lest he should carry vermin to his friends. Standing in the ranks it could be easily seen crawling all over the soldiers' uniforms and body. Thursday—Mohammedan Saturday—was washing day and the soldiers were made to carry their soiled clothes to a neighboring spring or brook and do their washing the best they could. In justice to the officers, it must be stated that they took pains to inspect the quarters occasionally and insist on general decency. A soldier was once given a tremendous blow on the face by an officer who saw him spit in the barrack room where soldiers slept, ate and attended classes squatting on the floor.

5. The marrying age is early in Turkey, so military service catches a man when he is married and often when he has a family. It is a cross to leave one's dependent family with nothing and serve in a remote corner of the Empire. It is more so when there is no cause involved. The author was once waiting outside the door of the commander of the division when a decrepit old woman from the outskirts of Bethlehem came with a husband old and half-blind, in order to plead their case. Their only son was drafted into the army leaving his helpless parents with his wife and four dependent sisters. The commander was human and showed sympathy but he could not alter the command of the war office. The son had to bear arms and the poor family was left to starve as gracefully as it could. This case is only one sample of thousands of others of similar nature. Is there any wonder that military service is obnoxious in Turkey? The case of a fellow who was imprisoned and starved by the recruiting officer, in order to verify the statement that he was deaf and dumb, throws light on the attitude of both sides on military service.

6. The official language is Turkish. It is difficult enough for an uncouth backwoodsman to go through the military movements with grace to say nothing of receiving orders in a foreign language. Arab, Armenian, Kurd, Greek and Bulgarian must learn enough Turkish to get along in the army. Often has the writer seen a reserve almost old enough to be the officer's father, slapped, knocked

about and sworn at because he was slow. All orders and commands are in Turkish and woe to him who is caught making a mistake.

These are a few samples of the attractiveness of the Turkish army.

Quite frequently one reads of the new standard of efficiency in the Turkish army since its modernization under German supervision. This may be so, but in the regiment of the author, which returned from the Balkan War, were men who saw active service and could not load a gun nor count up to thirty in Turkish. Many a soldier was exempted from leaving the barracks for drill because he had no shoes, his uniform was too ragged and humiliating or he did not have his complete equipment. The modernization may have been in a slight change of uniform, but as to efficiency let the Balkan and present wars speak.

This much, however, could be said in favor of general conscription, that it is an active agency, if properly guided, in breaking down Moslem fanaticism. It never had dawned on some Mohammedan soldiers that Christians could be really human. They had the honest conviction that Christians were infidels and enemies of the true Faith. It was both amusing and illuminating to hear some remarks on this subject. In going through a town on the way to a sham battle, a woman offered the soldiers water to drink. "She certainly must be a *Moslem*" was the comment; "Moslem" used to mean "good"—very much like our use of the word "Christian." At another time during a mercilessly severe drill the writer heard the exclamation "By God! this officer could not possibly be a Moslem," which was the strongest way to describe the officer's cruelty.

Although a non-Moslem is a curiosity in the army, he is not denied the common decencies. He is always spotted as the "Masihi"—Christian or "Yahoodi"—Jew. Usually he is befriended on account of his financial standing. Tobacco, coffee, and sweetmeats make friends among the soldiers. On Sunday a Christian is allowed to go to

church, so is a Jew on Saturday. The author asked a Jewish comrade, once "How do you eat food prepared by the gentiles?" He threw up his hands and replied "I don't like it a bit, but what can I do?"

The army had more than its share of attention and attempts at reform. That it has not accomplished much is only a matter of history. From this the reader can judge how much reform the other departments underwent. From the above reasons the reader may understand why military service is so unpopular.

### *Scene 2—Parliament*

It would be unfair to lay all the blame on the Young Turks for the conspicuous failure of their constitutional government. It was a demoralized and a degenerate population they had to handle. Tyranny, oppression, misgovernment, crushing injustice and abuse left the inhabitants devoid of independence, self-respect, honor, integrity and all the qualities that go to the making of a man. What was worse, moreover, the new leaders did not prove themselves any better than the common herd. The Young Turks were "weighed in the balance and were found wanting." The people do not trust the government. As they express it "It is a government of 'take' but never 'give.'" The State took everything the people had and gave them nothing whatever in return. The Young Turks have it before them to prove themselves honest, to say nothing about efficiency. The Parliament was a joke and of all farces it was the most genuine. From the very nature of things, it was bound to be a joke. To the Young Turks it meant the monopoly of power and to the masses exemptions from taxation. The author took a crude census of illiteracy in a town of about 4000 people ten miles north of Jerusalem. The educational, moral and social standard of the town was especially high on account of 25 years' effort of the American Friends schools therein. About 800 men of that town are in America which is another favorable factor. With all



these influences, only 30 per cent of the inhabitants could read or write. This is a high percentage since Turkey as a whole has no more than ten or fifteen in a hundred that are literate. What, then, does self-government mean to such as these?

The writer watched a Turkish election with a considerable amount of interest and curiosity. He talked freely with the "sheiks" who were chosen to elect deputies for Parliament. In his school were pupils whose fathers and uncles were deputies, thus giving him a chance to know something of the material that went to the Capital. The one impression that one receives of the whole thing is crudity. Noah's Ark was perhaps less crude for a ship. Commotion, talk, discussion, noise and great preparation precedes election. The election day was about three or four weeks long. Squabbles, quarrels, heated debates and vociferous disputations announced the coming of the "Day." The primary electors were usually the sheiks or heads of tribes who presided over the primitive assemblies in a guest house squatting on the floor sipping black coffee and smoking cigarettes. It was the writer's privilege to drink the coffee and listen to the discussion over the election. Fitness for office did not figure. Notoriety, special capacity for noise, shrewdness and the size of one's following fitted him for office. The several electors whom the author knew were unscrupulous, sharp, greedy, domineering and abominably selfish. They were versed in the business of extortion and robbery, being middle men between the government and peasants; so they were naturally *the* men to fit with Young Turkish machinery. From a district of about twenty-four villages seven men were elected, two of whom were Christians and five Moslems. A crude ballot box was carried around and escorted by armed gendarmes. Most everybody knew, however, who was going to be elected as the candidates for such an office were of a marked type. The primary electors were sent to the nearest city—in this case Jerusalem—to elect deputies. The Christian electors went straight to the Patriarch of the Greek Church, kissed his

hand and then he blessed them and dictated to them what to do. Those High Priests are usually "wolves in lambs' clothing" and since they were in partnership with the governor-general the deputies were sure to be after the Young Turks' own heart. Those sheiks were taken to a spacious tent prepared for the purpose, awed by the presence of governor, military commander and other dignitaries, doped with black coffee and nicotine and carried out the explicit orders of their bosses. Some of those fellows told the author that they were intimidated by jail unless they voted in a certain way.

In this way the Young Turks conduct an election and such is the type of men whom they *appoint* to Parliament. There is on record case upon case of customs officials who were *Turks appointed* as deputies to represent an Arabic community of whose language they were ignorant and in whose welfare they had no interest. Arab, Armenian and Greek howled for representation commensurate with numbers but in vain. The Greeks and Armenians refused to participate in the elections until their request was granted. They received promises which were never fulfilled.

The author lived twenty years in Turkey before the Constitution and two years after it had been four years in operation. He searched diligently for reform. Perhaps he expected too much but he found practically nothing tangible except a little postal reform. It seemed as if seven devils displaced one when the Young Turks dethroned their predecessor. As will be shown further the methods and policies of the new reign were anything but constitutional. Here endeth scene 2, act I of the celebrated farce of 1908.

#### ACT II—BLUNDER

##### *Scene 1—Turkification*

Religious, racial and linguistic diversity in Turkey is one of its most gigantic problems. The Young Turks gave no heed to the light of history and steered on rocks.

1. Albania is a war-like, freedom-loving country. It

is Turkish by neither tradition nor speech, yet the Young Turks sought to force the Turkish language and character down the Albanians' throats. Albania would not tolerate it and revolt followed.

The writer visited a government elementary school of 95 boys and two teachers. The boys' ages averaged between nine and fifteen. Their mother tongue was Arabic and the class visited happened to be geography. While a boy went out to prepare the cup of coffee the lesson went on. The class was conducted in Turkish. "What is the population of London?" asked the teacher. "129,000 square kilometers" was the reply. Another little fellow was asked to name the capital of Russia and he said it was Siberia.

This is an example of the ludicrous policy of "turkifying." Let it be remembered that practically only one-fifth of the population is Turkish, yet the official language all over the Empire is the tongue of the minority. In Syria where Arabic is the vernacular, court proceeding reports, receipts, notices, proclamations, deeds, passports, and every official document is in Turkish, a foreign language. Offices of responsibility are filled by Turks. The school superintendent of the district came to visit our American school. The author sought to communicate with him in the language of the country, but he could not speak it. French and German were resorted to but he did not know anything of either except "au revoir!" and "merci!" And of course he did not talk English if he knew no French. His educational qualifications for the position were the mere fact that he was a Turk; and such was the agent of the Young Turks to develop the most needed phase of reform-education.

What a howling wilderness the imagination of those so-called reformers must be in pursuing the mad policy of turkifying the whole Empire by force! Think of the Greek discarding the speech of Plato and Aristotle to adopt that of Othman! Imagine the proud descendants of the Prophet taking kindly to the language of their early slaves! exchanging the language of the Koran for that of the Turks! Yet these are the tactics of the New

Party. Only the Turks are considered; for the very foundation of the Revolution was mainly national—by that meaning purely *Turkish*. The Constitution proclaims equality in the sense that one Turk equals five of other races. Here is an example: Soon after the Revolution, some American universities offered scholarships of free tuition to a limited number of students whom Turkey might send. When the writer was at Columbia, he knew there five Turkish government students supported by public money. Four out of five were Turks and one was Greek. There were plenty of Armenian and Syrian students both in Robert College and in the American College at Beirut whom the government might have sent and thus honor all the races in the Empire. Two of the five might have been a fair ratio in favor of the Turks, but it did not strike them that way. It cannot be said for a minute that the others were not competent to profit most from a university education in America, since by impartial opinion the Turk is the intellectual inferior of the Greeks, Armenians and Syrians. In his *Modern Egypt* Lord Cromer states "The Armenians with the Syrians are the intellectual cream of the Near East."

This propaganda of turkification has been openly resented by several organizations. In Beirut a Reform Club composed of the most notable religious, social and business leaders demanded racial representation and a decentralized form of government. This Club advocated local government for Syria with allegiance to Parliament. The writer happened to be in Beirut when the Club was closed by military force and newspapers favoring the scheme, silenced from discussing the matter. Its members found refuge in the British Consulate and later carried on the propaganda in Paris. The following is a translation from the Arabic of a few of those demands.

1. Absolute necessity of reform.
2. Actual participation of Arabic-speaking people in the government of their provinces.
3. The official recognition of Arabic in Arabic-speaking communities.

4. Arabic-speaking troops to serve within their own boundaries.

The government considered this program, made promises and they are unfulfilled to this day. The Young Turks lost the respect or rather created no respect because they were so stubborn, uncompromising and tyrannical. The language and race troubles in Poland, South Africa and Alsace-Lorraine shed not a ray of light on the ruinous course of turkifying. They have been obstinate and turned deaf ears to the cries of their subjects, and now they are reaping the results.

*Scene 2—Administration*

If Turkey needs anything it is honest men—officials with self-respect, integrity and a sense of duty. The Empire has material for administrators if they are only given the chance under experienced and modern advisers. Turkey needs more the free and democratic American institutions than it does the somewhat oppressive atmosphere of Europeanism. If Turkish officials could only understand what it is to subordinate their own pockets to the public good, an important step would have been taken towards civilized standards. This point is not in danger of being over-stretched as honest public servants in Turkey are as rare as hen's teeth. It is folly to expect officials who had served under Abd-ul-Hamid to practise this theory of "State first." The momentum of corruption, graft and decay is too tremendous to halt in a decade or two. It can only be retarded with the strictest vigilance of an enlightened administration that will give moral evolution all the acceleration it can.

Aside from the moral point of view, the Young Turks have proved themselves incompetent. Such a vigorous attack of political insanity which has possessed Enver Pasha and his clique has few parallels in history. Perhaps Enver's madness somewhat resembles that of Napoleon III. He is brave yet without balance. The condition of the country at present is more the result of his fool-

hardy conduct than any other one factor. He dominated the whole Young Turkish Party by his dash and personality. He became the master of them all. When the country was bankrupt after the Balkan War and Djevad Bey "touring the West" to negotiate for fresh loans at exorbitant rates of interest, the insensate Enver was bargaining for a rusty dreadnought from Brazil at the price of \$15,000,000. In addition to this we must reckon interest, up-keep and salaries to foreigners as the Turks do not know enough to handle machinery. This may seem insignificant to the comfortable American but it was preposterous for Turkey to think of it when she was already \$150,000,000 in debt, facing another war indemnity after having lost Tripoli and European Turkey. It was a crime to buy dreadnoughts when the poor soldiers were half-starved and 25 per cent of all government salaries went for war revenue. A government clerk taught a few Turkish lessons in our school and he often spoke of how his little salary of \$15 a month was three or four months in arrears and when he got it one-fourth was deducted to pay the war bills. How was he, then, and thousands of others to support their families? Resort to defrauding the public, of course!

A town of 4000 people was taxed about \$400 three times during one year. That was a *direct* war tax on top of the already heavy taxes and indirect war revenue coming from a tax on tickets, freight, notices, advertisements, personal checks, telegrams, postal money orders and commercial papers of all kinds. Aside from all that, subscription blanks were distributed by government agents for the purchase of aeroplanes and battle ships. Add to all this the compulsory military service which took men away from their work and imagine if you can the economic condition of the country!

Throughout their entire administration the Young Turks showed a conspicuous lack of statesmanship. The sojourn of 400 years in Europe did not civilize them. Even during their constitutional era they resorted to the barbarous practice of assassination in order to thwart a politi-

cal opponent. Had the disagreement of Taft and Roosevelt been in Turkey, most likely one of them would have been murdered. Political jealousy and dispute did away with Shevket Pasha and the hero of Adrianople. Enver was jealous of a certain Aziz Bey, an Egyptian officer who distinguished himself in Tripoli, so as Minister of War he had him arrested and his death sentence pronounced by a courtmartial. Had it not been for British intercession which was the result of the storm of protest in Egypt, Aziz Bey would have been killed for personal reasons.

Kamil Pasha was one of the sanest statesmen in Turkey. His policy was peaceful during the last wars. Enver Pasha with pistol in hand went into the cabinet room and forced the Vizier to resign.

The Young Turks blame European greed and interference for their failure. This is partly true; for it was nothing short of highway robbery for Austria and Italy to grab Bosnia and Tripoli. Along with the Balkan War they dealt a staggering blow to internal reform. To a certain extent the Turks were right in resenting foreign interference which was expressed in capitulations granting foreign post-offices, exemptions from income tax and other humiliating things. But these concessions were the outcome of misgovernment in Turkey. As long as the Turkish post-office was a "den of thieves" foreign post-offices were a decided blessing not only for foreigners but for natives as well. In Jerusalem there were five foreign post-offices and the people had absolute trust in them while the Turks themselves could not trust their own postal service. A clerk in the Turkish post-office once saw something in the mail that looked like a fountain pen from America. He happened to need one so he helped himself. This instance could be duplicated many a time.

The capitulations were humiliating and unjust but they had a place in an uncivilized country like Turkey. Let American editors rave about Turkey's right to run its own government unhampered by foreigners. Let them sputter about human rights and Turkey's sovereignty!

Let such men live *in* Turkey and be subject to Turkish mistreatment and injustice and then give an exposition about her human rights!

ACT III—PERDITION

*Scene 1—The Great War*

It is too early to say anything about the probable results of this war as affecting Turkey. The outlook is black for her when the Allied fleet is already steaming up the Dardanelles and the whole Empire is torn by internal disorders. Pillage, famine, tyranny and suffering are everywhere. The people are sighing for a change.

*Scene 2—The Unseen*

It has been the feeling of many enthusiastic Arabs to re-establish an Arabic Mohammedan State with Cairo for its capital. They dream of Harun-Rashid and his glorious reign. Great Britain does not seem slow to understand the situation in proclaiming a Sultan in Egypt. It is the wish of many Moslems in Turkey to be under the protection of Britain and enjoy the peace that now reigns in Egypt. Turkey has been dying for over a hundred years but it is not dead yet. "Oh God how long!" is the cry on the lips of the oppressed population in Turkey. They are praying for its end. The last scene of this farce is behind the curtain but this war may bring forth relief. Perhaps Turkey's entrance into it is a blessing after all; for in the words of Eastern wisdom "An end with horror is better than horror without end."